

fact, I am here to do the exact opposite—to remind the Senate that prejudging the case is not our job. That would overstep long-established boundaries and weaken our system of checks and balances. Lately, though, some of our Republican colleagues have attacked the NLRB and have tried to poison the decisionmaking process. They are interfering with the case pending before a legal body. For example, every Republican Senator on the HELP Committee—and let's remind everyone, the "I" in HELP stands for "labor"—sent a letter to the Acting General Counsel defending Boeing. The letter itself, sent 6 weeks before a hearing even takes place, seems questionable at the very best, but these 10 Republicans went further. They went out of their way to link their request to the Acting General Counsel's pending nomination. If there were ever a case of intimidation, that sounds like it to me. But that is not all. Eight State attorneys general—all Republicans—also signed a letter to the Acting General Counsel calling on him to withdraw the complaint against Boeing—again, long before an administrative judge has had the opportunity to even look at the case, let alone review the case.

I strongly encourage all of them to take a step back, my Republican colleagues on the HELP Committee and these attorneys general. We all know Republicans dislike organized labor. We know they disdain unions because unions demand fairness and equality from the big businesses Republicans so often shield at all costs. So let's be honest—Republicans are threatened by unions. They are threatened because when a large organized group is so concerned with workers' rights, the members of that group vote in large numbers. And because Republicans and the big businesses they defend so often try to take away workers' rights, workers don't often vote Republican.

This kind of interference is inappropriate, it is disgraceful and dangerous. We wouldn't allow threats to prosecutors or U.S. attorneys trying to stop them from moving forward with charges they see fit to bring to the courts, and we shouldn't stand for this. It may not be illegal, but it is no better than the retaliation and intimidation that is the fundamental question in this case, and it should stop.

We need agencies such as the NLRB to be able to operate freely and without political pressures. We need to keep our independent agencies independent. This case is for them to decide, not for us to decide.

Would the Chair now announce morning business.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business for debate only until 2 p.m., with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each, with the first hour equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees, with the Republicans controlling the first 30 minutes and the majority controlling the next 30 minutes.

The majority leader.

Mr. REID. I note the absence of a quorum, and I ask unanimous consent that the time run equally.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The minority leader.

Mr. MCCONNELL. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The minority leader is recognized.

ENERGY

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, yesterday Democrats unveiled yet another attempt to slow American energy production, this time through a tax hike on American energy. They acknowledge, however, that this will not lower the price of gas, and they are right.

The Congressional Research Service tells us that raising taxes on American energy will do two things: It will increase the price of gas, and it will increase our dependence on foreign competitors. By taxing American energy production, they are also outsourcing American jobs. So let me get this straight: higher gas prices, fewer American jobs, and more dependence on foreign competitors at the expense of American energy? That is their plan? No thank you.

DRAFT EXECUTIVE ORDER

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, I was happy to see the No. 2 Democrat in the House yesterday take a stand against the President's proposed Executive order, a proposal disguised as increased "transparency," which would allow the administration to review a company's political donations before deciding whether to award a Federal contract. That is right; the administration would be able to review a company's political donations before decid-

ing whether to give them a Federal contract.

Here is how he put it: This is the No. 2 Democrat in the House:

[The] White House plan to require federal contractors to disclose political contributions could politicize the bidding process and undermine its integrity.

Similar efforts have already been rejected by the Supreme Court, the Federal Election Commission, and the Congress during the last session of the Congress. Now there is bipartisan opposition to the administration's Executive order.

The White House is spinning this as "reform," claiming the American people deserve to know how taxpayer money is being used by contractors. However, the proposed Executive order would exclude Democratic allies, including Federal employee labor unions, environmental groups, and, of course, Planned Parenthood.

As I have said, no White House—no White House—should be able to review a contractor's political party affiliation before deciding if they are worthy—worthy—of a government contract. No one should have to worry about whether their political support will determine their ability to get or to keep a Federal contract or to keep a job.

The issuing of contracts by the Federal Government should be based on the contractor's merits, bids, and capabilities. Under no condition—no condition—should political contributions play a role in that decision. However, the White House draft Executive order makes it crystal clear that if a contractor wants to do business with the government—if they want to do business with the government—they cannot contribute to the Republicans.

As Senator COLLINS recently pointed out, this Executive order would basically repeal the Hatch Act and inject politics back into the procurement process. This is simply unacceptable.

Democracy is compromised when individuals and small businesses fear reprisal or expect favor from the Federal Government as a result of their political associations. So the recent press reports about this unprecedented Executive order raise troubling concerns about an effort to silence or intimidate political adversaries' speech through the government contracting system.

The White House still has an opportunity to not go forward with this order, and you can rest assured we will be watching very closely because the proposed effort would represent an outrageous—a truly outrageous—and anti-democratic abuse of executive branch authority.

It is my sincere hope that the recent reports of the draft Executive order were simply the work of a partisan within the administration and not the position taken by the President himself. He should state his position.

Mr. President, we are waiting for your response.

Madam President, I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from South Dakota.

RAISING THE DEBT CEILING

Mr. THUNE. Madam President, since I first came to the Congress back in 1997 as a freshman Member of the House of Representatives, I have been talking about spending and debt and deficits, and that was a key, central element of my campaign for my first election to the House of Representatives way back in the day. Of course, at that time the numbers were a lot less daunting than they are today.

If we just look at even where we were 15 years ago in relative terms, the point at which we find ourselves today is almost overwhelming. The debt now is over \$14 trillion. We are being asked to raise the debt ceiling even further. I would argue we can no longer afford to put these hard decisions off because these are serious times and these call for serious solutions and serious leadership. I hope we are up to that task.

For a long time we thought debts and spending and deficits and all those sorts of things could be acceptable up to a certain level, and I suppose to some degree that is true. Historically, if we look at our country in terms of revenue and spending, over time we have consistently had a certain amount of debt that we carried. But I think by any stretch, any American, any economist, anybody who watches this closely has to recognize the situation in which we find ourselves today is unprecedented in American history and cries out for action—immediate action and bold action.

This is something I would argue my constituents are very concerned about—I think all Americans are very concerned about—because, again, if we look at it in relative terms, where we are today—\$14 trillion in accumulated debt—and we go back in the annals of history and look at from the formation of this country back in the late 1700s until 1849, our Federal Government spent—if you can imagine this—only about \$1 billion over that 60-year time period.

Today, we will borrow \$4 billion. Between today at 9:50 a.m. and this time tomorrow at 9:50 a.m., our Federal Government will borrow \$4 billion, which, to put that into perspective, suggests we will borrow, in the next 24 hours, more than four times what we spent in our first 60 years as a nation.

Now, in fact, in 1835, under President Andrew Jackson, the government debt—for the only time in our Nation's history—was completely paid off. Since that time, our debts have been large and small, with large runups in the debt during times of war, while the debt largely declined during times of peace. Never, though, did our debt top even 50 percent of our entire economy, of our GDP, until the Great Depression.

At the end of World War II, debt topped 120 percent of GDP. But in the postwar period, debt steadily declined

as a percentage of our economy, attributable to a couple factors: One was strong economic growth, and the second was a government that managed to keep spending relatively low.

When we look at the post-World War II time period, and we get into the 1960s and we reach the end of the 1960s, in that time period to 2008—from 1969 to 2008—on average government spending consumed about 20.6 percent of our entire economy while taxes during that time period on average were about 18 percent of our economy. That, in balance, led to a sizable but a manageable national debt. Debt held by the public just before this President took office was \$6.3 trillion.

Now, to put it into perspective, during the previous 40 years the budget was balanced on five occasions. So if we look back, in the last 40 years of our Nation's history there were five occasions on which we were able to balance the budget. In each of these years—and those were 1969, 1998, 1999, 2000, and 2001—spending was below the historical average.

In 1969 spending was just 19.4 percent of our GDP. In 1998 it was 19.1 percent of our GDP. In 1999 it was 8.5 percent of GDP. In 2000 and 2001 it was only 18.2 percent of our GDP. So when we look at the years when our budget was balanced, spending averaged just under 18.7 percent of GDP. So what are we set to spend this year? Madam President, 24.3 percent of our GDP—an astonishing 30 percent more than we have spent historically when our budget was balanced. Our debt held by the public at the end of this year will be nearly double what it was when this President took office.

So how did we get to such a high level of spending? Well, to be fair, I think we would have to say some of this is attributable to the economic downturn. Obviously, tax receipts, revenues, are down as a consequence of the economy being in a recession. We also have the ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, which have been expensive and, obviously, have required a large commitment of resources in order to conduct the operations that are necessary for success there. But I would also argue that a substantial chunk is due to the spending spree that Congress has been on since 2008.

Between 2008 and 2010 spending on nondefense discretionary programs went up more than 20 percent even though inflation over that same time period was around 2 percent. When we add in what eventually the bailouts of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac are going to cost, which will be hundreds of billions of dollars, that adds significantly to the debt. Of course, the stimulus boondoggle cost us over \$800 billion in the short term. When we add in the interest costs that are associated with that, it will be over \$1 trillion—which was all borrowed, borrowed money, borrowed from our children and grandchildren.

When we look at the percentage, as I said before, of spending \$1 trillion, lit-

erally, on that one program, that one policy, the stimulus program that went into effect a couple years ago, that is literally a thousand times more than what we spent as a nation in our first 60 years of its existence.

If we look at the projections included in the President's budget, it is revealing that it never balances, and that is due entirely to spending. Spending under the President's budget never falls below 23 percent of our entire economy, of our GDP. After 2015 it grows, and there is not a single year when the spending does not grow as a share of our economy. So we have this constant growth in overall spending as a percentage of our GDP that is way beyond the norm if we look at any sort of historical average.

So when the President submitted his initial budget to the Congress, I think we were all hopeful it would demonstrate an acknowledgement that he gets it; that he understands the dimensions of this problem and how serious our fiscal and financial straits are. But the budget he submitted to Congress a few months ago actually increased spending over the 10-year time period, massively increased the debt, and raised taxes on our small businesses at a time when, as I said earlier, we are hoping to get the economy growing and expanding again, which helps address many of the problems I just mentioned. We cannot have economic growth when we are raising taxes on the job creators in our economy, which is our small businesses.

I would argue the two things that are going to be necessary for us to get our economy back on track and to address this issue of spending and this out-of-control debt are to get spending under control, to make the hard decisions that have been put off for far too long; and, secondly, to put policies in place that will enable and create the conditions for economic growth and job creation.

Well, if we look at what the current administration is doing in terms of policies, what I hear as I travel in my State of South Dakota from small businesses—I hear it from agricultural producers—is that at almost every turn they are facing new regulations, new policies coming out of Washington that do not reduce the cost of doing business but actually increase the cost of doing business and drive down their margins, make it more difficult for them to invest capital, to hire new people, and to get this economy going and expanding again.

There are numerous examples of that. We have a number of agencies that are just issuing, promulgating regulations, pursuing an aggressive agenda, much of which cannot be accomplished in Congress because there are not the votes in the Congress to accomplish much of that agenda. So the administration has decided, by just sort of an executive power grab, to try to accomplish much of that agenda.

Well, as I said before, most of those policies are things that make it more